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XXVIII.—THE STORY OF GEBIR

Walter Savage Landor's professions, found everywhere in his letters, that he is writing for the few, and his rather studied contempt of the *aura popularis*¹ are best illustrated by his epic poem, *Gebir*, first published in 1798. For this extraordinary poem the guests are, indeed, few and select. Southey's admiration for the epic was unbounded; Lamb refers to its creator as "*Gebir* Landor";² and Shelley read and re-read the poem.³ Yet so unknown was *Gebir* to the general reader that De Quincey remarked that *Gebir* had "the sublime distinction, for some time, of having enjoyed only two readers, Southey and myself."⁴ And Miss Seward wrote Todd, the editor of Spenser and Milton, that *Gebir* was "the most unintelligible fustian that ever bore the name of an epic poem."⁵

This unpopularity was due primarily to Landor's obscure manner, but partly also to the story of *Gebir*, which was not familiar through popular legend, and which sprang from hidden sources. Landor was a man of great and capricious learning. The sources of his narrative poetry are often from the minor—very minor—writers of an-

¹ Besides Landor's lines, *On His Seventy-fifth Birthday*, and frequent allusions to his own unpopularity, another passage has interest: "He who is within two paces of his ninetieth year may sit down and make no excuses; he must be unpopular; he never tried to be much otherwise; he never contended with a contemporary, but walked alone on the far eastern uplands, meditating and remembering." See *Heroic Idylls with Additional Poems*, Preface.

² *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, VIII, 924.

³ Thomas Hogg, *An Anecdote Biography of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 64.

⁴ *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, VIII, 289.

⁵ *The Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, 29. Miss Seward to the Rev. J. H. Todd, June 11, 1802.

tiquity, or from forgotten dictionaries of erudition. The legend of the king, Gebir, or Gebirus, the invader of Egypt, became through Landor the theme of a nineteenth century epic.⁶ What is the history of this story?

Gebir was from Iberia; the legend is concerned with adventures in Egypt; and the most ancient version of the tale is from Arabia. But records of Iberia, of Egypt, or of Arabia offer no evidence of the historicity of Gebir. The name, as far as I can discover, does not exist in such histories except in the case of Arabia, and in this record the Gebir mentioned is clearly not the warrior in question. Thus *La Grande Encyclopédie*, for example, speaks of: "Geber [*sic*] (Abou-Mousa-Djaber ben-Hayyan Ec Coufy) célèbre chimiste arabe, qui a vécu vers le viii^e ou ix^e siècle de notre ère."⁷ And, again: "Geber . nom sous lequel on désignait, au moyen âge (en le considérant à tort comme ayant donné son nom à l'algèbre), le mathématicien arabe Abou-Mohammed Djafir ibn Aflah, de Séville, qui vivait dans la seconde moitié du xi^e siècle."⁸ Nor does the literature of these countries indicate that King Gebir was a character either of legend or of fiction.

In fact the story of Gebir is connected not with literature of the Christian era, but is linked in a shadowy fashion with stories of Biblical antiquity. Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe in her *History of Joseph* refers to the legend as antecedent to Joseph's adventures in Egypt. The nurse of Sabrina, to comfort her mistress in her passion for Joseph, tells her the story of the "rich Gebirus," who wooed Charoba.⁹

⁶ Forster says that the name, Gibralter, was derived from the word, Gebir. See John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 49.

⁷ XVIII, 683.

⁸ *La Grande Encyclopédie*, XVIII, 682.

⁹ Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book VI, p. 47.

Likewise the first part of William Sotheby's Saul is reminiscent, at least in manner and incident, of the story of Gebir.

This story, however, is not found in the Bible. It is probably of little significance, but it is interesting that the name or word, Gebir, rare, if found at all elsewhere, does occur in the Bible, both alone and in compound. Thus the Israelites encamp in Eziongaber:¹⁰ "The king, Solomon, made a navy of ships in Eziongaber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom."¹¹ "Jehosophat made ships of Tharsish to go to Ophir for gold, but they went not; for the ships were broken at Eziongaber."¹² Later: "Went Solomon to Eziongaber, and to Eloth, at the seaside in the land of Edom."¹³ But besides the place the person is mentioned: "The son of Geber, in Ramothgilead; to him pertained the towns of Jaïr the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, three score great cities with walls and brasen bars."¹⁴ It should be noted that the word Geber means "a valiant man." He was one of Solomon's purveyors and had sole jurisdiction over Gilead.¹⁵ Yet there is no evidence to connect this Geber and the Gebir (or Gebirus) who was the invader of Egypt and the lover of Charoba.

Apparently the first version of the story of Gebir in its entirety was that found by M. Pierre Vattier, Arabic Professor to King Louis XIV. This was a manuscript,

¹⁰ *Numbers*, xxxiii, 35, 36.

¹¹ *I Kings*, ix, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, xxii, 48.

¹³ *II Chronicles*, viii, 17.

¹⁴ *I Kings*, iv, 13.

¹⁵ *The Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, iii, 760.

written in Arabic, in the Mazarin Library. Its full title was: *The History of Ancient Egypt, according to the Traditions of the Arabians.—Written in Arabic, by the Reverend Doctor Murtadi, the Son of Gapiphus, the Son of Chatem, the Son of Molsem the Macdesian.*¹⁶ This manuscript M. Vattier translated into French as *L’Egypte où il est traité des Pyramides, etc.* In his preface M. Vattier praises the legend, and notes resemblances in certain points to classical literature: “Were there nothing in this story worthy of our notice but the Fable of Gebirus and Charoba, with the Adventures of the Shepherd, and the Sea-nymph, I should not repent of my trouble in this Translation.—I little thought to find in an Arabian writer, a story so nearly resembling the fables of the Greek and Latin poets.—While I was writing, it frequently reminded me of the 4th book of the Odyssey, and of several parts of *Ovid’s Metamorphoses.*”¹⁷

The *Bibliotheca Britannica*¹⁸ records the translation into English of M. Vattier’s version by John Davies in 1672. Miss Reeve says nothing of this translation, but it has always seemed possible that she may have consulted it. I have been able to compare Davies’ translation with Miss Reeve’s version. It is evident that Miss Reeve depended in no way upon Davies’ translation. Her tale is clearly a very free rendering of the French, with noticeable omis-

¹⁶ See *The Egyptian History of the Pyramids, The Inundation of the Nile, etc.* Faithfully done into English by J. Davies of Kidwelly, 1672; and see Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, Preface, pp. XIII-XIV; and *Poems, Dialogues in Verse, and Epigrams by Walter Savage Landor*, edited by Charles G. Crump, II, 369-70.

¹⁷ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, Preface, p. XIV. Mr. Crump doubts the fidelity of M. Vattier as a translator of this manuscript. See *Poems, Dialogues in Verse, and Epigrams by Walter Savage Landor*, II, 370.

¹⁸ See *Davies and Egypt*.

sions. In Davies' book Gebir has a brother Gebirim; there is no such person in Miss Reeve's story. In addition, there are numerous differences of detail such as the number of the Gaddites, the effect of the nurse's message upon Gebir, and the name of the nymph. But, more than this, long episodes occurring in the French and in the English translation are left out. A digression¹⁹ dealing with charms employed by Gebir is unused; the account of the seven tombs visited by Gebir is much compressed; and the method of murdering Gebir is altered. There is never a chance echo of the phraseology of Davies. In all likelihood Miss Reeve has translated the French, and has used the story to suit her fancy.²⁰

Such is the history of the story of Gebir up to the time that it was read and utilized by Landor. It is highly

¹⁹ One of the several episodes found in Davies but omitted by Miss Reeve is the following:

"Know, great Prince, that the Land of Egypt is a Land of Enchanters, and that the Sea there is full of Spirits and Demons, which assist them to carry on their affairs, and that they are those who take away your Buildings. But what means is there to prevent it? said the King. To do that (said she) you shall make great Vessels of Transparent glass, with covers thereto, which may keep the water from entering in; and you shall put into them Men skill'd in Painting, and with them Meat and Drink, for a week and Cloths and Pencils, and whatever is necessary for Painting. Then you shall stop the Vessels well, after you have fastened them at the top with strong Cords, and ty'd them to the Ships, and then you shall let them go into the Sea like anchors, and you shall put at the top of the cords little Bells, which the Painters shall ring; and then I will tell you what it is requisite that you should do." In the story Gebir obeys directions. The painters ring the bells, and are taken out the water with the "Draughts" they have made. Then comes the extraordinary climax: Statues are made like the "draughts", and the beasts of the sea, imagining that these are other demons, flee! See John Davies, *The Egyptian History of the Pyramids, etc.*, pp. 126-128.

²⁰ Miss Reeve was acquainted with the passage on Gebir in Mrs.

improbable that Landor was familiar with or had, indeed, heard of any version of the legend except Clara Reeve's. Forster says that Landor often related to him the incident which led to the composition of *Gebir*. While staying at Swansea, one of the ladies of the family of Lord Aylmer lent him a book from the Swansea Circulating Library. This book was *The Progress of Romance. Through Times, Countries, and Manners; with Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of It, On Them Respectively; In a Course of Evening Conversations*. The author of the book was Clara Reeve. Landor, says Forster, "found it to be a history of romance, having no kind of interest for him until he came at its close to the description of an Arabian tale. This arrested his fancy, and yielded him the germ of *Gebir*."²¹ The story was called by Miss Reeve *The History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt. Taken from a History of Ancient Egypt, According to the Traditions of the Arabians*.

Landor's great indebtedness to this story has been understated both by the biographer, Forster, and by the poet himself. Landor was led into exaggerated statements about his own originality in the poem by the following remark which appeared in the *Monthly Review*: "The poem is nothing more than the version of an Arabic tale."²²

Rowe's *History of Joseph*, quoting it in her Preface, p. xv. This passage runs in part:

"When Totis by his death, the sole command
Of Misraim left to fair Charoba's hand;
The rich Gebirus from Chaldea came
With foreign pomp to seek the royal dame.
Chemis adorn'd his train, whose beauteous face
Allur'd a goddess of the watery race;
On Nilus' banks the young Chaldean stood,
When lo Marina rising from the flood,—"

²¹ John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 47.

²² The *Monthly Review*, February, 1800.

This was grossly untrue, but Landor is hardly more truthful in his reply, a *Prose Postscript* to *Gebir*, suppressed, but partially available in Forster's *Life of Landor*.²³ In this Forster quotes Landor as saying in effect: "There is not a single sentence in the poem nor a single sentiment in common with the Arabian tale. Some characters were drawn more at large, some were brought out more prominently, and several were added. He has not changed the scene, which would have distorted the piece; but every line of appropriate description, and every shade of peculiar manners, were originally and entirely his own."²⁴ I shall compare first the general outlines of the two stories of Gebir, Clara Reeve's and Landor's; secondly, in some detail, the parallelisms and divergences in the two stories, point by point, endeavoring to demonstrate two facts: First, that the statement of the *Monthly Review* was unjust. Landor's *Gebir* is certainly much more than "the version of an Arabic tale"; he has altered and created, and the essence and spirit of the nineteenth century poem is his. Secondly, that Landor, too, is unjust when he says that "there is not a single sentiment in common with the Arabic tale"; in some respects Landor has followed his source closely.

The first eight pages of Miss Reeve's romance describe the visit of Abraham and Sara to Egypt. There Charoba, the daughter of Totis,²⁵ the King of Egypt, receives Sara in friendship, bestowing many gifts upon her, among them Hagar, later the mother of Ishmael. When Abraham leaves Egypt, Charoba causes her people to guide him, and Abraham prays for Egypt, and blesses the Nile. Later Abraham and Sara find among their possessions treasures which Charoba has secretly placed there. They bless

²³ P. 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁵ Totis is the legend's name for Pharaoh.

Charoba, and use the money for sacred purposes. When Hagar is delivered of a son, she sends word to Charoba. Totis conveys provisions to her through a channel made from the Nile in the eastern part of Egypt. Thus friendship is established between the Arabians and the Egyptians. Totis becomes unjust, is poisoned, possibly with the connivance of Charoba, and, after some dissension, Charoba is selected in his place.

Gebir, a giant and king of a giant race, resolves to marry Charoba, and invades Egypt. If Charoba refuses his request, he means to dam up the Nile with stones which he has brought with him for this purpose, and so starve the Egyptians. In alarm Charoba asks counsel of her nurse, who, flattering Gebir,²⁶ begs him, with his stones, to build a city. Gebir consents, but demons tear down the city as he builds.

In the midst of Gebir's distress one of his shepherds meets the "young lady of the sea".²⁷ Accepting a challenge to wrestle, the shepherd is worsted and loses, besides the best beast of his flock on the wager, his heart to the nymph. The shepherd confides in Gebir who conceives the idea of changing garments with his servant. He meets and subdues the nymph and learns from her how to make statues which will frighten away the demons. Yet Gebir's city is still unfinished from want of money. The nymph again counsels him, this time to offer various sacrifices of bulls' galls. Her orders are followed implicitly by Gebir, and his city is miraculously completed. Charoba now fears that she must marry Gebir, but the nurse plots against him. She induces Gebir to send his friends to her in three parties, successively, and she poisons in turn

²⁶ In Miss Reeve's tale the name is always Gebirus.

²⁷ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 122.

each group. The nurse then kills Gebir with a poisoned robe. Gebir dies, cursing Charoba, and ordering it to be inscribed upon his tombstone that he has met death through the guile of a woman. He prophesies Charoba's death which, three years later, is accomplished. Dalica, a kinswoman of Charoba, becomes queen.

Landor's story begins with the invasion of Egypt by Gebir and his race of giants. Charoba confides in her nurse, called by Landor Dalica. Dalica persuades Charoba to seek out Gebir, and to urge him to build a city in Egypt. At the first meeting Gebir falls in love with Charoba, but, unwilling to indulge in the softness of love, he leaves her, and goes to Tamar, his younger brother, who is in charge of the royal flocks. Gebir means to divulge his passion to Tamar, but Tamar anticipates him by confession of love for a nymph, whom he met near the sea, and who challenged him at wrestling. The nymph had defeated him, and had won his love. Gebir reveals his love for Charoba.

As Gebir begins to build his city, it is continually destroyed by an unknown force. Gebir disguises himself as Tamar, meets the nymph and overcomes her. She, to win Tamar whom she now loves, reveals to Gebir certain rites. Having sacrificed before the city, Gebir sees an abyss open beneath him. He enters and visits the regions of the dead, beholding his own ancestors, and various great figures of the past.

When Gebir returns, fear and love contend for mastery in Charoba. Meanwhile, her people have learned to respect Gebir, and desire a marriage between him and Charoba. But Dalica, to whom Charoba has not confessed her love, plans treachery against Gebir. She visits her enchantress sister Merthyr, at Masar, and receives from her a poisoned robe which she means to throw about Gebir.

Landor then digresses to relate the happiness of Tamar with the nymph, who shows to her lover the glories of the ocean. There follow pictures of the warriors at their games, and of Charoba at her bath. Yet amid all the exultation Gebir is inexplicably uneasy. He plans, however, to make his declaration to Charoba. At this dramatic moment Dalica wraps the poisoned robe about Gebir. The king's death anguish is great, and Charoba's grief is hardly less. Dalica, with wild invocation, exonerates Charoba of complicity. Gebir rouses to take leave of Charoba, and then dies.

Landor omits all the ancient story prior to the invasion of Gebir. His poem commences with Gebir's coming, because of "meditating on primeval wrongs,"²⁸ and not merely, as in the source, because he hears of Charoba's fame. Both stories dwell on the fact of Gebir's giant race. The phrases are very like: in the first "men of great stature and strength";²⁹ in the second "men of gigantic force, gigantic arms."³⁰ The detail of the stones on the heads is used by Landor, with fidelity to the original, though he turns it into vivid verse. Miss Reeve says: "Every one carried a large stone upon his head, and was completely armed."³¹ Landor writes:

". . . nor sword sufficed,
Nor shield immense nor coat of massive mail,
. upon their towering heads they bore
Each a huge stone, refulgent as the stars."³²

In Miss Reeve's story Gebir asks Charoba where he may enter Egypt, threatening, if she refuses, to dam the Nile

²⁸ *Gebir*, l. 6.

²⁹ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 115.

³⁰ *Gebir*, l. 13.

³¹ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 116.

³² *Gebir*, lls. 15-17.

and starve the Egyptians. Charoba confides in her woman servant, "an artful, subtle, contriving woman, and a great Enchantress,"³³ who counsels strategy. Most of this Landor omits. Charoba asks advice of the nurse, who urges Charoba herself to persuade Gebir to build a city. Landor makes much of the meeting of Charoba and Gebir. At this point in both stories occurs the shepherd episode. Each version is substantially the same, but Landor has expanded the incident into a closely packed narrative concerned with the beauty of the nymph and the passion of Tamar, who is here also the brother of Gebir. Now occurs the most famous passage in *Gebir*, the description of the sea-shell:

" . . I have sinuous shells of pearly hue,
Within, and they that lustre have imbibed
In the sun's palace-porch, where when unyoked
His chariot-wheel stands midway in the wave:
Shake one and it awakens, then apply
Its polisht lips to your attentive ear,
And it remembers its august abodes,
And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there."³⁴

³³ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 117.

³⁴ This passage, like others in *Gebir*, was first composed in Latin. It read:

At mihi caeruleae sinuosa conchae
Obvolvunt, lucemque intus de sole biberunt,
Nam crevere locis ubi porticus ipsa palati
Et qua purpurea medius stat currus in unda,
Tu quate, somnus abit."

Wordsworth imitated the passage on the shell in *The Excursion*:

" . . . I have seen
A curious child, applying to his ear,
The convolutions of a smooth-lipp'd shell,
To which, in silence hush'd, his very soul
Listen'd intensely, and his countenance soon
Brighten'd with joy; for murmuring from within
Were heard sonorous cadences.

See Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IV.

Landor's story ends differently, for Tamar is in love with the lady, and Gebir confesses to him his passion for Charoba. Landor drops the incident for a time, but Miss Reeve adds the sequel at once. Gebir changes garments with the shepherd, defeats her, and learns from her charms with which to frighten away the demons. With her help Gebir finishes his city. Some of these details Landor uses, but not until later. Yet, though Landor's treatment of the source is often free, his account of the first conversation between the lady and the shepherd is almost paraphrase.

Landor next describes in great detail the building of the city, and its destruction by unknown forces. The people attempt to propitiate the gods, but in vain. It is then that Landor introduces the sequel of the shepherd episode, following the source closely. In Clara Reeve's tale we read: "Thou shalt sacrifice a fat bull to every one of those

Byron also uses the figure in *The Island*, Canto II, Stanza 17:

"The Ocean scarce spoke louder with his swell
Than breathes his mimic murmurs in the shell,
As, far divided from his parent deep,
The sea-born infant cries, and will not sleep,
Raising his little plaint in vain to rave
For the broad bosom of his nursing wave."

A critic once rebuked Byron for taking these lines from Wordsworth, though Byron, unlike Wordsworth, had acknowledged the source. Landor knew of this plagiarism, and commented on it in the *Imaginary Conversations*. In the dialogue called *Southey and Landor* Landor says: "I do not look very sharply after the poachers on my property. One of your neighbors has broken down a shell in my grotto." See *The Works of Walter Savage Landor*, edited by Charles G. Crump, IV, 283. In *Archdeacon Hare and Walter Landor* Landor remarks: "My *Sea-Shell* which Wordsworth clapped into his pouch. There it became incrustated with a compost of mucus and shingle; there it lost its "pearly hue within", and its memory of where it had abided." An interesting modern version of Landor's idea may be found in Eugene Lee-Hamilton's *Sea-Shell Murmurs*.

statues, and cause the pillar under it to be rubb'd with the blood of the bull; then perfume it with the hair of his tail, and shavings of his horns and hoofs."³⁵ And later: "Rub the door with remainder of the bulls' galls, and perfume it with the shavings of the horns and hoofs, and the hair of the tails, and then the door shall open."³⁶ Landor writes:

"And at each pillar sacrifice thou one.
Around each base rub thrice the blackening blood,
And burn the curling shavings of the hoof,
.
.
.
The yellow galls, with equal care preserv'd
Pour at the seventh statue from the north."³⁷

From this point Landor's story departs far from the original. Gebir descends into subterranean regions of pure Landoresque invention. The third book of the poem opens with an apostrophe to Shakespeare. Gebir beholds the spirit of Aroar, who fought under his forefathers, and witnesses the torment of the lost souls that live by the "weary river." Beyond, separated by a flaming arch, he sees the abodes of the blest. Before him pass the spirits of famous Kings, among them George III, Louis XVI, and William the Deliverer.³⁸ Gebir meets also the spirit of his own father.

Similarly, the fourth book owes nothing to the source. The story proceeds as related up to the time of the plot to kill Gebir. Here, as noted, Dalica, the nurse, secretly

³⁵ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 126.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁷ *Gebir*, Book II, lls. 219-224.

³⁸ In printing *Gebir* Landor condensed the poem by reducing it nearly one-half. In the last edition about one hundred and fifty lines were eliminated from Books III and VI, most of these allusive to contemporary events. The line in the original, describing Napoleon as "a mortal man above all mortal praise," was qualified by a note.

secures charms from her sister. Landor describes the horror of Dalica as she watches her sister prepare the poison.³⁹ But in Miss Reeve's story there is a detailed account of the joint plans of the nurse and Charoba to get rid of the King's party before he himself is attacked. All this Landor omits, and besides these omissions and changes in the fifth book of his poem, his sixth book bears no relation to the source. It describes the love affair of Tamar and the nymph. This part of the poem is enlarged by some one hundred and fifty lines of political allusion, among them the striking reference to Napoleon. The picture of the games is Landor's invention. But the great difference between the poem and the source at the end is in the dénouement. In Miss Reeve's poem Charoba hates Gebir; in Landor's poem she loves him. In the source she has achieved her end and is happy; in the poem she is bereaved. Landor depends upon the tragic death scene at the end. Miss Reeve, however, goes on to relate briefly further fortunes of Charoba, together with her death, and the succession to the throne of Dalica. Yet in both Gebir rouses, seemingly dead, to address Charoba; in both the poisoned garment is the means of Gebir's death; and in both is the employment of the servant or nurse as the instrument of Gebir's death.

Such a comparison indicates the untruthfulness of the reviews in saying that the poem, *Gebir*, was merely a version of an Arabian tale. It is evident that Books III, IV, and VI, and most of Book V are Landor's invention. He omits the first episode of the old story, and the last episode in the history of Charoba. The story is basically altered

³⁹ Landor stated that he took these lines from a passage in the pages of the traveler, Bruce. It is very possible that the precise origin was the chapter on *Cerastes, or Horned Viper*. See James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, vii, 292ff.

for the poet's own purposes. He develops and relates to the main story the love affair of the shepherd. The poem is filled with contemporary allusions. Above all Landor has enriched and expanded the legend into an epic poem of seven books and two thousand lines. *Gebir* is remarkable for compact thought, luminous image, and dignified emotion.⁴⁰ The passage on the sea-shell is itself remarkable.

On the other hand, Landor's indebtedness to Miss Reeve cannot be gainsaid. He has clung to fundamental facts and incidents: the character of Gebir; the building of the city; and the aid of the nymph; the poisoning of Gebir. It is perfectly possible to prove that a number of passages in *Gebir* are taken almost *verbatim* from the source. *Gebir* is neither a "version" nor is it "originally and entirely his own."

Landor's poem has not made the legend of Gebir immortal. *Gebir* is not a great epic. It was written before Landor was twenty-one years old; it exhibits many of the faults of youth, and some which belong to pedantry. Perhaps the *Quarterly Review* was right when it said that *Gebir* was a poem it did any man credit to understand.⁴¹ But it should be recalled that Landor did not write for the *Quarterly Review*, or for its readers; of such he was frankly contemptuous. Landor was unique in being honest when he declared he wished only the approval of his peers.

⁴⁰Much of the lofty mood of *Gebir* is traceable to Landor's reading during the year 1797. He was under the spell of Pindar. "When I began to write *Gebir*," he wrote Forster in 1850, "I had just read Pindar a second time and understood him. What I admired was what nobody else had noticed,—his proud complacency and scornful strength. If I could resemble him in nothing else, I was resolved to be as compendious and exclusive." See John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 46.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 49.

With respect to *Gebir* he said he would be satisfied, if he secured ten thoughtful readers. In this he succeeded. *Gebir* is important for the student because it made a profound impression upon a few great men of letters. These were, chiefly: Coleridge, DeQuincey, Southey, Lamb, Scott, and Shelley,⁴² though there might be numbered among the admirers of *Gebir* the lesser names of the Hebers, Charles Wynne, Frere, Canning, Humphrey Davy, and Bobus Smith. William Sotheby was appreciably influenced by *Gebir* in his poem, *Saul*, and Sergeant Rough became the author of a tragedy, *The Conspiracy of Gowrie*, in direct imitation of *Gebir*.

Coleridge was fond of quoting from *Gebir*,⁴³ and, though De Quincey alludes whimsically to himself as "a Mono-Gebirist",⁴⁴ asserting that only he and Southey had read the poem, his admiration for the epic was profound. Southey declared that *Gebir* possessed "some of the most exquisite poetry in the language,"⁴⁵ and just before going to Lisbon he wrote Coleridge: "I take with me for the voyage your poems, the Lyrics, the Lyrical Ballads, and *Gebir*,—these make all my library."⁴⁶ In the *Critical*

⁴² In April, 1808, Southey wrote a friend of Landor: "I have often said before we met that I would walk forty miles to see him; and, having seen him, I would gladly walk four-score to see him again." It was Southey's praise in the *Critical Review* for September, 1798, which first drew thoughtful attention to *Gebir*. Lamb, too, who, tipsy or sober, was always quoting *Rose Aylmer*, praises *Gebir*, admiring especially the passage describing the ocean in Book V. Sir Walter Scott thought highly of *Gebir*. See John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 50, note.

⁴³ Coleridge found *Gebir* like a piece of dark ground filled with bright eminences.

⁴⁴ The history of the manuscript is related by Landor in a short poem written about the epic, *Gebir*. See *Lines on Gebir*.

⁴⁵ John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Review for September, 1798, may be found Southey's sincere but apparently extravagant tribute to *Gebir*. Though Southey was most eloquent on the subject, the poet most deeply influenced by *Gebir* was Shelley. James Hogg writes: "I often found Shelley reading 'Gebir.' There was something in that poem which caught his fancy. He would read it aloud, or to himself sometimes, with a tiresome pertinacity. One morning I went to his rooms to tell him something of importance, but he would attend to nothing but 'Gebir.'" ⁴⁷ Hogg threw the book out of the window, yet Shelley returned to it again. Browning was wont to declare that he owed more to Landor than to any living poet, and there is ample evidence to prove that this youthful epic of Landor's affected definitely the poetry of the period.

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⁴⁷ *Anecdote Biography of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 64. Shelley's favourite passages were the description of the ocean and that of Merthyr preparing her charms, both in Book V.